

**Houston Planning Commission**  
**Suburban Subcommittee Meeting**  
**Monday, August 15, 2005**  
**Summary**

**Attendance:**

Joseph Necker	Clark Martinson	Joel Marshall
Mark Froehlich	Phillip Franshaw	W. Michael Schaffer
Robert Heinemen	Zane Segal	Ernesto Maldonado
Kerry Gilbert	Shaukat Zakaria	Steve Spillette

**I. Discussion on the use of Detention Ponds for meeting compensating open space requirements**

**Background**

Compensating Open Space definition (42-1): *COS shall mean one or more areas designated as common open space on a subdivision plat or a development plat that are used to reduce the minimum lot size requirements pursuant to the provisions of article III of Chapter 42.*

**Standards for compensating open space Sec. 42-185**

*(a) Compensating open space shall be used to reduce the minimum lot size requirement only to the extent that the area proposed to be dedicated to compensating open space meets the requirements of this section.*

*(b) The following areas shall not be used for or considered compensating open space:*

*...(4) Detention ponds, drainage ways water areas including floodplains and flood ways, or ravines unless they are developed as amenities pursuant to an open space amenities plan approved by the commission.*

**Issue**

There is no language in the ordinance that specifies criteria for an amenity plan or addresses the usability of a detention area. A range of amenities plans are submitted to meet the requirement of the ordinance. The examples below show the different projects submitted with amenities plans.

**Examples**

- 1) Royal Terrace – in city limits
  - a. 12.3 ac. project with 64 lots
  - b. Combined COS/Detention/Amenity = .892 ac., Detention = .785 ac.
  - c. Provided scale drawing showing 15-gal. trees, shrubs, concrete benches, sidewalks, arbor, volleyball court
  - d. No information on side slopes, wet or dry detention
- 2) Courtyards at Ella Sec. 1 - ETJ
  - a. 15.6 ac project with 127 lots
  - b. Combined COS/Detention/Amenity = 3.44 ac.

- c. Provided scaled drawing showing ballfields (multiuse for soccer, football, baseball), 20' berm with 6' crushed granite trail forming a 1590' loop, benches, planted with 30 live oaks
  - d. 3:1 side slopes; trail to bottom at 7.5':1 slope. No information on wet or dry detention
- 3) Brunswick Lakes - ETJ
  - a. 320 ac project with 1095 lots
  - b. Combined COS/Detention/Amenity = +/- 54 ac.
  - c. Provided scaled drawing, elevations/sections, illustrations, and narrative depicting size and depth of lakes, 90 water-loving trees (60-gal.) and plants, wetlands, 6' concrete trails, benches, etc.
- 4) Pinemont Square – City
  - a. 19.42 ac project with +/- 120 lots
  - b. Combined COS/Detention/Amenity = 2.6 ac.
  - c. Provided scaled drawing showing play area/ballfield, benches, proposed plantings, 4' concrete sidewalk.
  - d. No information on side slopes, wet or dry detention (applicant explained at commission meeting).

### Objectives

- To develop specific amenity plan guidelines for the Planning Commission to follow.
- To determine if the type of detention (wet or dry) or type of amenity (active or passive) should affect whether a detention area can be used to meet the Compensating Open Space requirement.

### Discussion & Concerns

- 100% of the area identified Detention/COS in an amenity plan is currently counted toward the COS requirement.
- Rate of draining/discharge depends on whether stormwater quality measures are applied in the detention/amenity area. Draining depends on grass cover, soils, and slopes.
- PWE looks at the depth and size requirements for drainage.
- PWE looks at the discharge based on the undeveloped condition and the impact that development will have on it. The discharge/runoff drainage rate should be the same. Any additional development impacts the discharge/runoff drainage rate.
- Open space has value whether it is intended for active or passive recreation.
- Maintenance of the open space is a priority<sup>1</sup>. Detention and amenities in the same area should be encouraged for this reason.
- Slopes should be at 4:1 ratio to allow easy access
- A wet pond is not usable for active recreation.

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<sup>1</sup> A developer mentioned that in his experience, the HOA maintains the area.

- The committee agrees that areas where walking, running and biking can occur, and that can serve as habitat for wildlife and trash cans and benches are amenities.
- Should there be a percent of the detention that should be counted? What should that percent be?

### **Items for follow-up by Staff**

How are the areas shown on the examples drained – were they wet or dry, did they have stormwater quality measures in place?

## **II. Review Town Center Draft (Proposed Sec. 42-102)**

### **Objective**

To review proposed 42-102 Urban Center Designation (Greenfield) language.

### **Discussion & Concerns**

- The Town Center is submitted and reviewed as a general plan in the suburban area; however, the sections are reviewed based on the urban criteria.
- Developers cannot control the location of transit.<sup>2</sup>
- Transit services must be supported.
- A goal should be to encourage between urban centers.
- One of the objectives of these centers is to improve or increase the number people working and living in the same area. Urban Centers should be easily accessible by all modes of transportation including mass transit, pedestrians and bicycles.

### **Suggestions from Committee**

- On Criteria (1)(i) Sidewalks (**minimum 6 feet**)
  - (ii) Street trees (**20 ft minimum spacing**). **Follow Chapter 33 requirements.**
  - (iii) Pedestrian or bicycle linkages to the surrounding area
    - **Trail system/sidewalks**
    - **Maximum block length of 600 feet**
    - **Streets have to be pedestrian and bike-friendly**

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<sup>2</sup> Can the developers can initiate negotiations with the appropriate entity for transit stops to be provided in the area?